

MICHIGAN STATE MEDICAL SOCIETY

120 WEST SAGINAW STREET, EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN 48823, PHONE 517/337-1351

FAX 517/337-2490

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT 2012-2013 John G. Bizon, MD

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MEMO TO: The Senate Health Policy Committee

FROM: John G. Bizon, MD, President

RE: Senate Bill 136

On behalf of the more than 16,000 physicians of the Michigan State Medical Society (MSMS), I am writing to express our concerns relative to Senate Bill 136. While we share the objective of the sponsor to create an environment whereby a health professional may function in a manner consistent with their religious and moral convictions, we have concerns about the potential implications of enacting this legislation. Specifically, our concerns involve assuring that patients across the state do not somehow have their access to needed care impeded because of the moral convictions of another person.

First, it should be noted that Senator Moolenaar has gone to exceptional lengths to accommodate the concerns of MSMS and to address the most significant concerns of the physician community relative to this legislation. In addition, Senator Moolenaar and his staff have welcomed additional comments from the physician community to improve the wording of the legislation. Ultimately, it is the sense of physicians that this legislation is not needed because health care workers in nearly all settings are already working with their colleagues to come to arrangements at work or in practice in a manner consistent with their moral and ethical convictions. Furthermore, there is already a great deal of self selection that occurs with respect to prospective employees. Those prospective employees with specific moral objections are best equipped to make a determination about whether or not they may feel comfortable in the employment for which they are seeking.

Senate Bill 136 would impose a new requirement that physician practices implement an employee policy regarding moral objections as well as response timelines. However, the greater concern for physicians is how this policy could potentially impact the delivery of health care services in Michigan. Michigan already faces a shortage of physicians and other health care providers that create impediments to access for patients in Michigan. Senate Bill 136 may have additional unintended consequences that could make accessing certain types of services very difficult for patients. Physicians have had extensive experience in balancing their religious and ethical beliefs but never at the expense of the needs of their patients. Balancing a sincerely held moral belief and the needs of a patient can be a complicated and multifaceted set of considerations that will always be difficult to encapsulate in legislation. MSMS will continue to work with the sponsor of the legislation to best balance the concerns of health care providers with the needs of their patients.